



EPISODE 2x14:
“CONFLUENCE”

Written by DC Washington

Directed by George W. Krubski

Script Consultant: Paul Pearson

Selected scenes culled from the “SERENITY” Shooting Script and
Original Draft Script by Joss Whedon

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Head Writer & Executive Producer: George W. Krubski

Producers: Matt Engstrom & David Elmer

Art Director: Sean Young

Casting Director: Katie Fiorino

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Teaser

EXT. SPACE - ESTABLISHING

Serenity sails for a long silent beat towards and past us. Once the frame is empty:

RIVER (VO, whispered)
Creeping in...

INT. SERENITY - INFIRMARY

CLOSEUP: RIVER lies on the medical bed - trembling, mumbling to herself.

RIVER
(whispered fast-paced mumbling)
Slowly but still creeping into you and me and everything
and we can't stop it they won't let us. Can't get in can't
get out can't get away they're here... They're. HERE.

SIMON (OS, far away echo)
River?

FAST ZOOM OUT: River JUMPS as if she didn't even notice SIMON sitting by her side, suturing her ankle wound. PEARL lies in the side-gurney, asleep.

RIVER
Simon. So sorry...

SIMON
You don't have to apologize, *mei mei*. For anything.

FLASHCUT: A mummified corpse.

RIVER
Not yet.

SIMON
Wh-?

RIVER
(harried, anxious)
They keep coming and coming. So much crying not a
single tear! All that life then it just stops!
(closes her eyes tight)
But it won't! It won't stop! Simon **MAKE IT STOP!**

SIMON
Shhh... It's over. You're with me now. Safe. They won't
trigger you again, I promise.

Simon takes her hand. She winces. She opens her eyes – tears.

SIMON (cont'd)
It won't happen ever again...

Simon looks down at the hand he's holding – badly BRUISED. Despite that, her hand squeezes his hand tight. Simon stands with a look of mixed anger and determination on his face.

SIMON (cont'd)
I won't let it.

He leaves the room, anger all over him. After he's gone—

RIVER
(whispers, pleading)
Make it stop.

—Pearl opens her eyes suddenly, wide awake. Probably never asleep at all.

PEARL
I can make it stop, River.

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – SAME TIME

MAL sits at the table, his head in his hands. After a beat, ZOE comes down from the foredeck hall, sees him sitting there silently, and sits next to him. The air is heavy.

ZOE
We're clean, sir. No tails. Girl did some job on that patrol boat.

MAL
(lifting his head)
Looks like we crossed that line.

ZOE
Looks like. You okay with that?

MAL
Yan shui de ren bu pa xia yu <He who is drowned is not troubled by the rain>. Are you... okay with it?

ZOE
Seems I have to be.

Mal stands up, pushing his chair back with a loud squeal.

MAL
Right.

Simon suddenly storms into the dining area from the aft hall. He comes up close to Mal, their faces close enough to kiss – but based on his facial expression, that's the last thing he plans to do. Mal stands his ground.

MAL (cont'd)

You plan on hittin' me again? 'Cause this time I will hit back.

(no punch from Simon)

How's our newest crazy girl? We're building quite a collection.

SIMON

You selfish, arrogant, piece of <border-trash>.

MAL

Cuss all you like, Doctor. It's quite the entertainment, plus you're not particularly good at it. Every path has some puddles, and we got away dry. You got your data-thingy. No one was hurt.

SIMON

The bullet fragment embedded in my sister's ankle begs to differ.

MAL

Well, almost no one.

Simon clenches his fist, ready to strike. Mal doesn't flinch.

Zoe quickly stands, and gets between them.

ZOE

What the Captain meant to say was he is sorry—

MAL

No I didn't.

ZOE

VERY sorry, but an ankle wound is more than a fair price to pay for our lives. We're all sorry for what had to be done... but it had to be done.

Simon looks Zoe, then Mal in the eye for a beat, then turns away - enraged.

ZOE (cont'd)

(softly to Mal)

After all, that's how you win wars, right?

Zoe walks off, leaving Mal to watch her go.

INT. SERENITY - INFIRMARY – SAME TIME

FLASHCUTS: Dried, decaying corpses. Flies buzzing. A Reaver!

River snaps out of it with a gasp. Pearl lies on the side-bed, watching her.

PEARL
Are they dreams or memories, River?

RIVER
Dreams are the same as memories... to the desperate.

PEARL
Are you? Desperate?

River turns to look at Pearl – as if she's only noticing Pearl is in the room now.

RIVER
(looks straight at Pearl)
Where are you?

PEARL
I'm right here, River. With you.

River stares through Pearl for a pregnant beat. Pearl stares right back. Then Pearl closes her eyes, concentrating.

A PIERCING HIGH-PITCHED SOUND FADES UP, getting louder and louder. River quickly covers her ears in pain.

FLASHCUTS: More corpses. Flies buzzing – louder and LOUDER.

River screams.

SIMON (VO)
You know, I heard that.

INT. SERENITY - DINING ROOM – SAME TIME

Simon, at the other side of the table, stands with his back to Mal.

SIMON (cont'd)
'Winning wars.' Seems I'm not the only one who thinks
you're becoming what you hate. I hope it's worth it.

MAL
I don't have to justify myself to you.

SIMON
Don't you?

Mal brushes past Simon. As he is about to enter the aft hall, he's blocked by JAYNE coming up the stairs. Jayne has one hand caressing the LASER BURN in his shoulder, the other holds Vera. For a beat, each tries to stare the other down.

MAL
(fed up, softly)
You got issues, Jayne, get in line.

JAYNE
We gotta have words.

MAL
If they ain't "please", "thank you", or "please can I cook your favourite dinner, thank you", best you move from that doorway.

JAYNE
See, I don't think you appreciate how two killer-women is not better than one.

MAL
And you obviously don't appreciate the use of your legs. Move. Now.

JAYNE
It's dangerous. For us all. You know it, I know it, and my giblets sure as Sinhon know it.

Mal tries to push past Jayne but the big man stands his ground and gets in Mal's face. We now see his other hand: carrying his big-ass gun VERA.

JAYNE (cont'd)
I ain't gonna jus' stand around an'—

MAL
You're right.

Simon, watching this interaction in the background, is startled by Mal's words.

JAYNE
—let you put my... What?

Mal uses the confusion to push past Jayne, and continues walking. Jayne follows, catching up. Simon follows too.

MAL
However any of us feel about River, can't ignore what's real. She is a danger. And this new one's nothing short of a wildcard herself.
(looks Jayne in the eye)
Which is why you're gonna watch 'em.

SIMON
(walking fast to catch them)
What!?

JAYNE
Why me!?

MAL
'Cause you think so highly of everyone's safety.

They move down the stairs into the—

INT. SERENITY – COMMON AREA – CONTINUOUS

—where KAYLEE sits on a chair, watching River through one of the infirmary's big glass windows. From her POV, River stares quietly up at the ceiling, not in any pain.

MAL (cont'd)
(acutely aware of Simon)
If she don't play nice, can always just say the magic words, send her straight to Sleepsville.

SIMON
You smug son of a bitch! River could have died. Do you get that!? Do you even care!? No, you went and threw her away just to save your own damned skin!

MAL
(softly, gritted teeth)
I protect my crew, and won't apologize for it.

SIMON
So she's not your crew?

Mal pauses. No answer to that. Behind him, Kaylee watches, hand over mouth.

SIMON (cont'd)
You're not going near my sister ever again. Neither of you.
(points at Vera)
Especially with that. What's the gun for, big man?
Afraid of the little children?

JAYNE
Ain't no children on this boat.

FAST ZOOM INTO -

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY – SAME TIME

Pearl continues to sit quietly with her eyes closed, as if meditating. The piercing noise continues. River has her hands over her ears, seemingly in terrible pain.

Through the window, we see Mal, Jayne, Simon and Kaylee arguing, completely oblivious to River's anguish.

Pearl opens her eyes. The piercing noise stops. River calms and takes her hands off her ears.

PEARL

I can help you. Make the voices go away... You have to trust me, River.

Pearl – one arm cuffed to the bed – stretches over to reach River.

FAST ZOOM OUT TO -

INT. SERENITY – COMMON AREA – SAME TIME

Mal, Jayne, Simon and Kaylee stand at the bottom of the stairs, in the middle of their heated discussion.

KAYLEE

(sadness in her voice)

They're but little girls... Scared, tortured little girls.

JAYNE

You can put yer boots in the oven, li'l Kaylee, but that don't make 'em biscuits. They'll just as soon snap your neck with them scared, tortured little hands.

KAYLEE

That is not tr—

JAYNE

Them two is *sha-sho* <murdering> machines - and don't you come cryin' to me when they're out there holdin' a barrel at you, 'cause all you'll get from me is a big-ol' "told ya so."

MAL

The new one's asleep and shackled to the bed, Jayne. She ain't going nowhere, especially not near a gun of any kind. 'Sides, Kaylee'll baby-sit 'em with you.

JAYNE

What she gonna do things turn ugly? Smile 'em to death? Should shackle that other one down while you're at it, too.

SIMON
"That other one" being River?


JAYNE
Never name a pig you plan to eat.

Simon squares off against Jayne, who cocks Vera. A standoff. Broken by—
—a SCREAM.

They rush to the infirmary doors and yank them open, as:

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY – SAME TIME

BAM! Pearl jams a GREEN SYRINGE into River's neck. And injects it all.



Act One

INT. DARK ROOM

A MAN in silhouette, wearing GLASSES that glint in the dim light, holds a PORTABLE WAVE SCREEN. On it is grainy black-and-white FOOTAGE - the back of an INTERVIEWER'S head and a younger River facing him. River is haggard, like she hasn't slept in days.

INTERVIEWER
But you understand why these treatments are important?

RIVER
I don't think... I'm sorry. I think there's been an error. I don't think... I think I may not be... the right subject for these— for this program.

INTERVIEWER
It's perfectly natural to feel a little nervous.

RIVER
I just... If it were possible to be transferred, I would make a... I would like to request a transfer.

INTERVIEWER
You want to be back in Gen Ed?

RIVER
(whispers)
Please.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY – MOMENTS LATER

Chaos.

Simon and Kaylee move to River and grab her as she falls off the bed. Mal and Jayne move to Pearl, grabbing her, knocking the empty syringe from her hands.

MAL
(grabbing Pearl's arms)
Jayne, tie her down! All fours!

SIMON
Get her out of here!

Jayne tries things his way: he clocks Pearl on the back of the neck with Vera. Pearl collapses, unconscious.

Simon has River lying on the floor as he checks her pulse. Then River begins to CONVULSE.

SIMON
No pulse. Kaylee - Hold her down!

KAYLEE
(frozen)
Oh god... River!

SIMON
Kaylee!

Kaylee snaps out of the panic and holds River's arm. Simon appears calm but his hands shake as he grabs a syringe out of a drawer. River bucks and throws Kaylee clear like a bull-rider who couldn't hold on. Simon quickly puts the syringe to River's skin and before he pushes—

RIVER
(opens her eyes)
Simon.

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM – FOOTAGE

River looks at the interviewer, haggard, barely there. She's like a ghost.

INTERVIEWER
You told us that was no good for you. That it was too slow, that's why you're here.

RIVER
Please. It...
(suppresses a cry)
Hurts.

INTERVIEWER

Well, I can help you with that. You know how proud Doctor Mathias is of how you're progressing.

RIVER

I'm not progressing!

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY

Simon pulls the syringe away as River's convulsions stop, leaving her staring up at the ceiling with a look of calm on her face.

RIVER (cont'd)

I don't need... I'm fine. I'm better than fine. It's...
(realization)
Quiet. They're gone.

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S ROOM

INARA sits at her desk, drawing calligraphic Chinese lettering. JUDE stands behind her, his hands resting lightly on her shoulders.

JUDE

You're tense.

INARA

Can't seem to get it right... I'm not used to these tips. I left my favorite pen on Serenity.

(sigh)

Mal's probably using it as a toothpick right about now.

JUDE

You still have feelings for him.

INARA

What? I—

JUDE

(friendly, non-accusatory)

That's the sixth time you've said his name today.

Inara stands quickly, turns to look Jude in the eye.

INARA

I'm sorry...

JUDE

No need to apologize. Feelings are precisely that. How one feels. One cannot control emotion. It would be wrong even to try.

INARA
No, you're wrong. Right now...
(eye contact)
He's not the one I have feelings for.

They lean in. Close. He takes her hand. Lips line up and barely touch when Inara pulls away suddenly. A tear falls down her face. She turns away from him.

INARA (cont'd)
I'm sorry...

Jude looks at her with calm concern.

INARA (cont'd)
You'd best leave.

JUDE
If I've stepped out of turn, I apologize—

INARA
Please just go!

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY

RIVER
I'm fine. I really am.

River sits on one of the infirmiry benches, smiling. Her voice is calm, relaxed. Completely different to what we expect from River.

Mal stands in front of her, sizing her up. Simon checks on Pearl's bleeding skull, as she lies strapped down and unconscious on the gurney, but keeps glancing back at River. Jayne sits on top of Pearl, drinking a cola and watching River with suspicion.

MAL
Prove it.

RIVER
I ruined your deal, Mal. In the Maidenhead. Mingo and Fanta were planning to kill you, but you didn't know that, and they never got the chance. I remember everything. Something switched in my brain and I hurt all those people... I am sorry for everything I have put you through, really I am. If there was any way I could change it or take it all back, I would.

Simon, busy with Pearl, turns on hearing River – stunned.

RIVER (cont'd)
But the sad thing about time is that it only moves the one way.

Mal stares in complete shock.

MAL

Huh.

(recovery beat, keeping eyes on River)

Doctor: You. Me. Outside. Now.

INT. SERENITY – COMMON AREA – CONTINUOUS

Simon follows Mal out, and closes the door. We can still see through one of the infirmary door's TWO PORT-HOLE WINDOWS: River gives Kaylee a warm hug.

MAL

She's...

SIMON

(amazed grin)

Yes. I... I think she is.

MAL

Did you know-?

He shakes his head, eyes fixed on River.

SIMON

Nope.

MAL

(still processing)

But she's...

SIMON

Yep.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY/Common Area

INSIDE THE INFIRMARY: River looks over at Jayne, who is still sitting on top of the unconscious Pearl. Kaylee holds River's hand.

RIVER

You don't have to tie her down, you know. Or use her derrière as an armchair. She was only trying to help.

JAYNE

I'll decide who's helpful and where ta park it, thanks.

KAYLEE

Jayne—

RIVER
No, it's okay, Kaylee.
(smiles widely at Jayne)
You're my favorite, you know. Always have been.

JAYNE
I'm your what!?

RIVER
Never any confusing discrepancy between what you feel,
what you say. You're an open book. A short book. With
lots of pictures. But open nonetheless.
(off Jayne's confusion)
And by the way, I really am sorry about... you know.
(looks at his crotch)
Your...

JAYNE
Yeah, well.
(uncomfortable beat, stands up)
Yeah.

He moves to the door, looks at River one more time, then walks out, and shuts it again.

OUTSIDE THE INFIRMARY: He looks at Simon and Mal.

JAYNE
Now either I'm goin' *diān dǎo* <nuts> or she's—?

SIMON
Yep.

MAL
Yep.

BACK INSIDE THE INFIRMARY: River turns to Kaylee.

RIVER
Kaylee. You know, I've never been able to thank you. For
being a friend. Caring for me. About me. It's sounds so
<cheesy>.

KAYLEE
River, you're...

RIVER
(laughs)
Normal?

KAYLEE
I was gonna say welcome... I just can't believe it. We got
lotsa talkin' to do, missy! Oh! I gotta call the others!
Wash'll go flippity!

She races out the infirmary, leaving River alone.

Pearl's eyes snap open, like she was never unconscious. Blood still trickles from her scalp.

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S ROOM

Jude walks up to Inara and cradles her from behind. She tries to hide her tears.

JUDE

I am not leaving. Not like this. What is it, Inara? What happened?

INARA

I'm not ready for... with you. I thought I was, but I... I was...

(turns back to look at him, through tears)

I was raped.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY – SAME TIME

Pearl lies duct-taped hand and foot to the medical bed, her neck turned to River. Slowly, River turns her neck to Pearl. Their eyes meet.

RIVER

(a whisper)

Why did you wake up?

PEARL

Excuse me?

RIVER

On Khonsu. You woke up when we came. BECAUSE we came.

A tear falls down Pearl's cheek.

PEARL

They woke me. To stop you, I think.

(turns her head away, rushed)

Security protocol. At least that's what my brain has been telling me. But don't worry – I'm not programmed. They never got to finish.

(turns back to River)

I'm me. Me. Pearl DeLilley, Capital City, Osiris.

RIVER

Capital City?

PEARL
Born and raised. You know it?

RIVER
(shaky)
Sometimes I forget what it looks like...

A beat. Then another. River's face softens.

RIVER (cont'd)
They took you. In the middle of your life. In the middle of
a breath.

PEARL
They knew. They always knew. Where I lived, where I
went to school. That I was the one to find: top one
percent of my class, the gifted child, the special one.

RIVER
I know this story.

INT. SERENITY – COMMON AREA – SAME TIME

Mal, Jayne and Simon stare through the large window, in awe of River.

MAL
Well, my flabber is torn all the way to gasted... What the
hell was in that needle, doctor!?

SIMON
River found them on that base. I haven't had time to—

MAL
Well don't you wanna find out!?

SIMON
If you stop with the questions and let me back in th—

Zoe, WASH and Kaylee rush in and join Mal, Jayne and Simon at the large windows
on either side of the infirmary, mesmerized.

WASH
So she's really—?

MAL
Yep.

SIMON
Yep.

JAYNE
Yep.

WASH
The no-spitting, screaming, swearing, throwing, waxing
poetical about dismemberment, sort of—?

MAL
Yep.

SIMON
Yep.

JAYNE
Yep.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY – SAME TIME

PEARL
(tearing up)
Then it started. The tests. Hearing everything. Mom and Dad wouldn't come. They wouldn't see me. Doctor Mathias said I was a waste. Dead to them. Not their child.

RIVER
I'm sorry.

PEARL
A cancer in his brain, my father had. And I wasn't there to say goodbye...
(rushed, anxious)
Do you know what a brain tumour does to a person? It grows silently inside for years until it's too late. First, forgetfulness. Maybe weakness in an arm or leg. Then one day you forget how to speak. Or walk. After a time you can't even swallow your own saliva. If you don't choke to death, it kindly puts you out of your misery... by squashing your brainstem up against your skull.

Uncomfortable silent beat. River looks over at Pearl with sad empathy.

PEARL (cont'd)
Wow. Listen to me rambling! I'm sorry. I've been so... disconnected. I've forgotten how to interact with people.

RIVER
Oh, I've said more than my share of the spooky and unnecessary. Don't worry. Five minutes around people will remind you, I'm sure.

Jayne rushes in, pulling Wash by the sleeve.

JAYNE
Look, she ain't killin' folk or talkin' crazy or nothin'. Well? Go on girl – say somethin' all profound and normal-like.

RIVER
(to Pearl)
Maybe ten minutes.
(to Wash)
Hi, Wash.

Simon follows, pushes past Jayne and Wash.

SIMON
River? Can I... Can we talk?

INT. SERENITY – COMMON AREA – MOMENTS LATER

Mal, Zoe, Jayne, Kaylee and Wash watch with mixed amazement and concern as Simon and River walk out of the infirmary, and off into the cargo bay, as if on a Sunday stroll.

WASH
Uh, am I the only one more than a little concerned about this?

Jayne clutches Vera tightly with both hands and starts following Simon and River.

JAYNE
Her “favorite” is all flavors of concerned....

MAL
(pulling Jayne back by his collar)
You’re both not wrong. She ain’t more predictable now. If anything, she’s less. But if there’s any chance... They both deserve a chance. I put ‘em through enough.

Kaylee smiles up at Mal. Mal looks back at her, a little uncomfortable. Then grins.

MAL (cont’d)
‘Sides, if things turn to turd, we always got ‘Sleepsville’.

Kaylee’s smile vanishes instantly.

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM

STATIC CUT. Grainy black & White.

INTERVIEWER
Doctor Xun told me you cut up your mattress this morning.

River sits silently for a long beat. She looks the worst we’ve ever seen her.

INTERVIEWER (cont’d)
Why aren’t you talking today, River?

RIVER
Always talk. Talk talk talk. Never listen.

INTERVIEWER
Well, talking is part of what we do here. Part of the system to make you... better.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY

River and Simon walk and talk, arm in arm. They both have huge smiles.

SIMON
I... I can't—

RIVER
Believe?

SIMON
I don't even know where—

RIVER
To begin?

SIMON
Stop that.

RIVER
(grins)
I'm the one who doesn't know where to begin, *ghuh ghuh*
<big brother>. Begin thanking you.

SIMON
You're...

RIVER
Better? Awake? Real? Take your pick. All true. I haven't
felt this way since I... Since... home.

SIMON
We've got the rest of our lives to play catch-up now.

RIVER
You've got your sister back.

SIMON
(grins widely)
Will you stop reading my mind! You were always back,
only...

RIVER
Broken.

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM

STATIC CUT. Grainy black & White.

RIVER

(manic ranting)

Yes I have a system. You make an assumption because you have a system, your system, you're symptomatic it's chronic! You think it's benign, but it has to be cut out, this system is simple... Blanket folded thus the sheet pulled taut the mattress. The mattress can't be trusted it has to be gutted. I looked under twenty and found a pea and you wonder why I'm not sleeping!?

(stares through the interviewer)

Are you worried that I cut up my mattress for no reason or that I had a perfectly good reason that you can't see? Can't...see...anyone. Even the orderlies wear masks.

INTERVIEWER

Why did you cut up your mattress?

RIVER

(leans forward, aggressive)

I am trying to protect my spine!

INTERVIEWER

Are you worried you might be injured? Your movement trainers have given you excellent marks—

RIVER

No one will give me a mission.

INTERVIEWER

A mission?

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY

River and Simon climb the catwalk stairs together, arm in arm.

RIVER

I guess miracles happen, and I don't plan to question it for long. And now I can finally say something to you that I've wanted to say for a long long time.

(emotional beat)

You're a <complete ostrich butt>.

SIMON

(not expecting this)

You're- I'm sorry – what?!

RIVER

For not asking Kaylee out. You're not twelve, y'know!

SIMON
(pushes her playfully)
Oh, don't start! You always did this to me, ever since I was twelve! Every girl I even looked at for longer than ten seconds, you assume—

RIVER
Give me reason to. Am I wrong about Kaylee?

SIMON
(beat, then smiles widely)
Brat.

RIVER
<Ostrich butt>.

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM

STATIC CUT. Grainy black & White.

RIVER
I have a reason. I'm... rea-son-a-ble. I have a reason.

RIVER (cont'd)
My movement hasn't been dictated yet but I am not here for nothing. I...am a...sti...sty. And you know I have a spine.
(calmly whispers)
There's something wrong... with the body politic.

STATIC CUT.

RIVER (cont'd)
(screams, falls across the table)
They're sticking in me! It's in the mattress, and it's crawling inside me! You cut it out, **You cut it out, You CUT IT OUT!**

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY

RIVER
Cut it-
(through laughter)
cut it out, Simon!

On the upper catwalk, River laughs hysterically. The cause – Simon is tickling her. She playfully tries to fight him off.

SIMON
(continuing the punishment)
Only when you take it back, Captain Giggles.

RIVER
Okay, okay! I take it back! You're not a chicken, goose,
ostrich, or any other type of poultry's posterior!

Simon stops. River takes a step back, catches her breath.

RIVER (cont'd)
But you're plainly a goat's.

And she bolts, giggling hysterically as Simon gives chase. They make it into—

INT. SERENITY – SHUTTLE ONE – CONTINUOUS

—where River has nowhere to run. River hides behind the ornate TRUNK in the corner, but Simon sees and leaps onto her, and they both crash onto the floor, laughing. They lie side by side, sucking deep breaths.

RIVER
We haven't done that in years.

SIMON
You haven't called me a duck's backside in a while.

RIVER
I aim to make up for lost time.

They laugh, which fades to a comfortable silence as they both stare up the ceiling for a long beat.

SIMON
You remember everything... don't you?

RIVER
I don't want to talk about it, Simon.

SIMON
I wish it were that simple, River. What about Miranda?

RIVER
It's not mine to remember. It's like a dream on the edge
of my thoughts. A memory too faded to grasp... Not sure I
want to remember it, anyway.

SIMON
It's important, River. Please try.

River looks pensive for a beat, then nods, closing her eyes in concentration.

FLASHCUT: A Reaver lashes at us, baring sharpened teeth.

River bends over, clutching her head like a she has a sudden headache.

RIVER
Seemingly temporal.

SIMON
What?

RIVER
Cycles. Seasons. Summer's fall is winter's spring. This too will pass. Your spine is showing.

Simon looks at her. Then realizes what's happening.

SIMON (VO echo, thoughts in River's head)
No.
(tearing up)
Don't do this.

She looks away, shaking uncontrollably.

SIMON
It's okay. Shhh... Don't worry. You'll be alright.

RIVER
I can't feel the sun.

Simon hugs her close, and behind her back, sheds a tear.

SIMON
It's alright.

RIVER
The cold sets in... All the smart ones know to go to sleep. Hibernate. As for the rest of us... This too will pass.

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM

STATIC CUT. Grainy black and white. River is disheveled, bags under her eyes.

INTERVIEWER
How are you today, River?

RIVER
Hearing it all now. Hearing and tearing. Tearing and hearing. A tear means nothing down here. I won't take the green you can't make me.
(screams)
Heartoomuch!

INTERVIEWER

But you want to be a *Gui*, don't you? Have a purpose? A mission?

River slowly nods.

INTERVIEWER (cont'd)

Then you must listen to Doctor Mathias. Take your Delcium and you will soon find everything is right with the world again. I promise. We all go through rough patches. Doctor Xun is fond of quoting King Solomon. You remember what King Solomon says, River?

RIVER

Yes. "This too will pass"... Yes... Will. Pass.

Static CUT.

Act Two

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S ROOM

Inara and Jude sit opposite each other on Inara's bed.

INARA

And then Mal shot him.

JUDE

I am... so sorry.

INARA

<It is I who am sorry>. I'm not capable of having a relationship, and I've led you to believe... I think you should just go.

JUDE

You need someone to help you through something like this, Inara. Did you not tell Sheydra? Mal? Anyone?

INARA

You're the first.

Jude moves closer, hugging her.

JUDE

Inara...

Inara lets it all out now – she sobs freely on his shoulder, holding him tight.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY

River lies on the medical bed, dissociated from everything around her, mumbling. Pearl, still duct-taped, watches her from the side gurney. Simon studies the computer readout of River's vitals, while Jayne stands in the corner, clutching Vera.

JAYNE

Flipped out on ya, huh?

(no answer)

<Crazy as canned pie> all over again?

(still ignored)

Ah, the circle of psycho. It's a bee-ootiful thing, ain't it?

SIMON

(looking up)

You can get out now.

JAYNE

Got orders to watch this one.

He sits himself down on a chair, and rests his feet up on Pearl.

JAYNE (cont'd)

So I'll just make myself comfy.

SIMON

Then shut your insensitive mouth.

FLASHCUT: Flies buzzing over the decaying corpses of people. Their buzzing sound overrides everything— Then: a Reaver, snarling, mouth wide!

RIVER

(screams, grabs Simon's hand)

Make it stop! Give it to me! Give it back! Giveitback
giveitbackgiveitbackgiveitback!

SIMON

I'm sorry, *mei mei*. Your blood pressure, your neural kinetics. All way above normal. If these were my readings, I'd be in a coma. I can't.

PEARL

I can. Simon, I can help her.

JAYNE

You can can it, is what.

Simon looks over at Pearl for a pensive beat. He strokes River's hair.

SIMON

That data-pen is upstairs. I'm sure it has information on this green drug. I'll go get it, and as soon as we know it's safe, okay?

River doesn't answer. Simon stands, and heads out the door.

PEARL

River, let me help you. I can make it all stop. I promise.

River looks pensive for a beat, then stands, moving to the door.

RIVER

I need the bathroom.

JAYNE

(standing, raising Vera)
Same as before. You walk in front.

INT. SERENITY - COMMON AREA – MOMENTS LATER

River drifts out slowly, a weak gait. Jayne follows, keeping Vera on her back.

Then River moves with sudden speed - darting past Jayne, back into the infirmary, sliding the door closed.

Jayne realizes too late what's happening, tries to pull the door back—

Ka-CHUNK! The infirmary door locks, sealing Jayne outside. He pounds on the door a couple of times, frustrated, angry.

JAYNE

Hey! Hey! Oh, <crap on a kebab stick>!

INT. SERENITY - INFIRMARY – SAME TIME

River grabs a handful of green syringes, putting some in the boots she is wearing. She then grabs a SCALPEL from a bench, moves to Pearl, starts cutting the duct tape on her hand. The binding comes off. River starts working on the other arm, then on her legs, and then Pearl is free.

River takes the handful of green syringes, holding them out to Pearl.

PEARL

Are you sure, River?

FLASHCUT: Flies buzzing around a mummified man, sitting comfortably at a desk.

She thrusts the syringes at Pearl. Pearl takes one, and quickly, without warning, stabs River in the neck.

River starts to seize - closing her eyes and collapsing to the ground. Pearl holds River's head as the spasms subside. CLOSEUP: RIVER'S EYES snap open.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Mal, Wash and Zoe stand together.

WASH
So she's all loony again?

MAL
'Fraid so. Worse than before. Whatever this drugs done to her, she's gone backwards now.

ZOE
It did seem too good to be true.

JAYNE (via com)
Mal! We got a problem.

A knowing beat between Mal and Zoe.

INT. SERENITY – ENGINE ROOM

Simon sits on Kaylee's hammock, watching a portable PDA-like VIDEO DEVICE, when Kaylee walks in.

KAYLEE
Simon?

Simon quickly covers the screen, then glances up at Kaylee, tears in his eyes.

Kaylee moves into the engine room, sits down next to Simon, concerned.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
What is it?

SIMON
It's...

He can't continue, so he lifts his hand off the screen for Kaylee to see. On it is a grainy black and white River, looking haggard – unkempt, distant, emotionally empty:

RIVER
It's the Pax.

INTERVIEWER
Tell me what you see.

RIVER
(monotone)

You lost the first one. You cut too deep; he died on the table. One of your attendants cried and you comforted her. "We're doing such good work."

INTERVIEWER

Do you understand that that is true? The work we do here is very important, and you're a part of that.

Long beat. River sits sad and still, never looking up to make eye contact.

RIVER

I would like to see my brother.

The video pauses.

Simon is on the verge of bawling. Several tears are already running down his face.

SIMON

Who does this? Who does this to a little girl!?

Kaylee puts her arm around him, and he puts his head on her shoulder. Reluctantly, he brings the screen up again and presses play:

INTERVIEWER

Well, you can write to him any time you like—

RIVER

I need to...

(whispers)

I would like please to see him.

INTERVIEWER

Well, I'm... sure he's very busy.

Long beat.

RIVER

Yes... Yes, I'm sure.

Static CUT.

Simon throws the screen angrily to the floor. As it lands - SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CHIEN'S SHIP – BRIDGE

CAPTAIN CHIEN sits, looking over notes when LIEUTENANT WALLACE, left arm bandaged in a sling, comes up to him in a hurry.

WALLACE

Sir! Priority message from MilCom. They have deciphered the message burst Doctor Mathias sent to Khonsu.

He hands Chien a piece of MOVING PAPER.

CHIEN

Perhaps Mathias has finally dug his grave this time.

Chien scans the report.

CHIEN (cont'd)

(to himself)

What the devil is a '*Gui*'?

He reads a bit more. Then suddenly he goes wide-eyed.

CHIEN (cont'd)

Wave the Operative. Immediately.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY – SAME TIME

Pearl supports River as she stands up. River's mannerisms are different, more normal: she's lucid again.

RIVER

Thank you, Pearl.

(takes a deep breath)

<Oh, thank you merciful God>!

PEARL

Nothing to do with God. It's them.

This gets River's attention.

PEARL (cont'd)

God didn't restructure your cortical pathways, River. It was them. They gave you this... ability. And if you hadn't left us when you did, you wouldn't be in the pain you are in now.

RIVER

(takes a step back)

"Us?"

PEARL

(innocent, chit chatty)

If they did this to you, it is only logical that they are the only ones who can fix you.

(holds up a green syringe)

PEARL (cont'd)

Who do you think invented this? I wasn't lying when I said I can help you, River. There is but one conclusion left to you if you want the pain to stop. Forever.

River backs up into a corner, as far from Pearl as she can. Pearl sits calmly. Deadly still.

RIVER

No...

PEARL

(innocent, chit chatty)

And that is to go back to them. To the Academy. We can go together. They can help us be like we were. But better... No more voices. Ever again.

RIVER

That's why I can't read you. You're—

Pearl's whole demeanor changes:


PEARL

(cold, harsh, mechanical)

Unreadable. A ghost, really. A vessel, hollowed out and now more than I ever was. Like you can be. So will you be. My programming dictates it. But there I go again, rambling on and on.

(smiles)

I told you I'd forgotten how to interact.



Act Three

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S ROOM

Inara and Jude lie opposite each other on Inara's bed. Inara wipes her wet eyes.

INARA

It's not a very Companionesque thing to do – crying on your shoulder.

JUDE

I think you and I both know our relationship is now more than Companion-client.

INARA

Thank you. For everything.

JUDE

It helps to talk. Tell me about your friends on that ship of yours.

INARA

(smiles, wipes more tears away)

Oh, Kaylee is the dearest soul. Sees the best in everyone. Even if they don't deserve it. She was— is my one true friend on Serenity.

JUDE

What about the other girl you mentioned?

INARA

Who? River? Oh, she's... special. If you think my past is troubling, you should hear hers. Poor girl lost everything. Even her sanity.

JUDE

Is she a danger?

INARA

Oh, no! Well, this one time she... She's really a wonderful person. I think you'd like her.

JUDE

(smiles)

I'd like to meet your friends... It's getting late. Perhaps I should let you retire for the evening.

INARA

Perhaps.

Jude stands, and makes his way to the door. Inara walks him out.

JUDE

Sweetest of dreams, Inara. Tomorrow brings promise of a better day.

Inara smiles, and closes the door.

A pensive beat—

—Then she quickly opens it again, pulls Jude back into the room toward her. She kisses him passionately. Pushes the door closed with her foot as she removes his shirt.

SIMON (VO)

I have to keep watching.

INT. SERENITY – ENGINE ROOM

Simon's sobs have subsided. His head remains on Kaylee's shoulder as he reaches down for the PDA-video device. Kaylee takes his hand.

KAYLEE

No. You can't. If it's affectin' ya this much, you can't.

SIMON

I have to! There must be something in there that can help her.

Slowly, Simon picks up the video-screen, reinserts the DATA PEN that popped loose. It loads a new image: a green syringe. Chinese text scrolls down the side.

KAYLEE

What is it?

LOUD FOOTSTEPS RUNNING. Simon and Kaylee look out the engine room into the aft passage: Mal and Zoe, coming from the dining room, guns raised, bolt down the stairs. He wearily stands, watching them go.

SIMON

It's a nightmare.

INT. LABORATORY

Grainy black and white footage. Not the interview room this time. A laboratory. 16 year-old River is strapped to a metal chair, needles stuck in her skull, being adjusted by a technician. A second monitors her brain patterns. The lab is cold steel. Insidiously clean.

2nd TECHNICIAN

She's dreaming.

1st TECHNICIAN

Nightmare?

2nd TECHNICIAN

Off the charts. Scary monsters.

DOCTOR MATHIAS walks into view.

MATHIAS

Let's amp it up. Delcium, eight drop.

The technician nods, and injects a solution directly into the central METAL ROD in her forehead.

Behind Mathias follows a GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR, observing. And making him a little nervous. The inspector is an older man: greying hair with a scar over his left cheek. Veteran-looking. He's seen his share of action.

MATHIAS

Most of our best work is done when they're asleep. We can monitor and direct their subconscious, implant suggestions...

River starts CONVULSING, mewling in misery. The inspector starts forward, slowly.

MATHIAS (cont'd)

It's a little startling to see, but the results are spectacular. Especially in this case. River Tam is our star pupil. Her mental capacity is extraordinary, even with the side effects.

The inspector stares at River, cold, rigid.

INSPECTOR

What use do we have for a psychic if she's insane?

MATHIAS

I don't have to tell you the security potential of someone who can read minds. And she has her lucid periods – we have a new drug. We hope to improve upon the—

STATIC CUT.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY

CLOSEUP: River's face, as a fist slams into it.

PULL BACK: River stumbles, but regains her composure as Pearl stands over her. All the LIGHTING is unnaturally over-exposed and colors are very bright.

RIVER

(calmly spits blood)

Do unto others...

River dives feet-first at Pearl.

INT. SERENITY – COMMON AREA

Mal, Jayne, and Zoe stare through one of the large side windows into the infirmary.

MAL

Um, what?

ZOE
What are they doing?

Simon and Kaylee arrive, stopping dead at the window – also dumbstruck.

INT. SERENITY - INFIRMARY

Overexposed, bright light. Pearl slings her body off the wall towards River. A human missile. River jumps impossibly high, and clings to the roof of the infirmary as Pearl torpedoes under her. Then River drops from the roof, foot first. Pearl blocks again - catching River's foot, spinning River about. She falls to the floor with a thud.

River is up in milliseconds. The two circle each other, each waiting for the other to make a move.

Pearl does - A punch. Blocked. A kick. Blocked.

A series of lightning quick martial arts attacks by Pearl and River, each perfectly countered by the other. It's a dead heat. And they both know it.

PEARL
You don't realize your potential, River. You've barely
scratched the cortical surface. Oh, what you could d—

River kicks a SCALPEL BLADE from a spilled tray lying at her feet.

SLOW MOTION: The blade spins vertically up in the air in front of River's face, hanging in the air, the light glinting off of it, everything else just out of focus. Then, timing it perfectly, she kicks the back of the blade again.

REAL TIME: The blade sails into Pearl's chest with such force it knocks her back.

SIMON (OS)
I think they're fighting.

INT. SERENITY – COMMON AREA

Through the window we see what they see - River and Pearl sit opposite each other, eye to eye, staring in intense concentration. Not moving. Not a scratch on either of them.

JAYNE
Ain't doin' the best job of it.

Mal taps the butt of his gun against the large window.

MAL
Hey! Whatever you two're doing in there... Uh, don't. Or
I'll shoot you! And one of you unlock this gorram door! Or
I'll shoot you!

No response. They continue to stare. Pearl's face contorts – like she's in pain.

INT. RIVER'S AND PEARL'S MINDS - INFIRMARY

Over-exposed, bright light. Pearl gets up off the floor, making no attempt to remove the blade in her chest.

PEARL

It doesn't have to be this way. I can help you, River. Soon your Delcium will wear off and all those memories not your own will come rushing back. You'll be that whimpering pile of useless once more.

RIVER

Better useless than used.

River jumps up into the air and hangs there impossibly long, Matrix-esque...

RIVER (cont'd)

As you said, I don't have much time.

...then slams down into Pearl – kicking the scalpel blade much deeper into her chest. Pearl crashes back into a CABINET, causing the cabinet DOOR to splinter off.

The fight is on. The two charge toward each other with full martial arts style. Pearl springboarding off the walls, and River blocking, countering with quick, flexible kicking and punching.

INT. SERENITY – COMMON AREA

Through the window now, Pearl's face shows intense pain.

ZOE

We gotta get in there.

JAYNE

(taking aim at one of the large windows)
With pleasure.

MAL

Don't hit either of them, Jayne.

Jayne grins.

MAL (cont'd)

Well, don't hit ours.

JAYNE

Oh, I'll do my very best...

Simon gets in the way – between Jayne and the window.

SIMON

Not a chance.

JAYNE (cont'd)

A bullet is comin' outa this gun with you standing there or not. You get the privilege of choice, doc.

SIMON

(staring Jayne down, not moving)

I hope you shoot yourself in the eye.

Wash nudges Zoe – “Do something!”

Jayne pushes Vera's barrel up against Simon's chest.

JAYNE

(taking aim)

Yeah, well, hope in one hand, spit in the other. See which gets full first...

INT. RIVER'S AND PEARL'S MINDS – INFIRMARY

Over-exposed, bright light.

PEARL

You don't want this. I know you, Riv—

RIVER

(picks up the broken cabinet door)

You've never met me.

SMACK! River connects the door with Pearl's face.

RIVER (cont'd)

You don't know me.

SMACK! Again, causing a gash across Pearl's eye.

RIVER (cont'd)

So while I'm still lucid, let me tell you all about River Tam.

UPPERCUT with the cabinet door – knocking Pearl back a distance into the wall.

RIVER (cont'd)

She doesn't play well with others.

INT. SERENITY – COMMON AREA – SAME TIME

Simon and Jayne stand very close together, Simon right up against Vera's barrel. The momentary standoff is broken by-

An EXPLOSION of glass as one of the infirmary door's small port-hole windows shatters. Mal, Simon and Jayne reflexively dive for cover.

They look up : Zoe stands before them, her mare's leg smoking.

ZOE

You three either kiss and make up, or kill each other,
don't much care which. But this ain't helping.

She puts her hand through the now windowless porthole and opens the door from the inside with a click.

INT. RIVER'S AND PEARL'S MINDS - INFIRMARY

Pearl looks down at her hand – in it is a long SHARD OF GLASS. In the REFLECTION of the glass, Pearl smiles.

INT. SERENITY – COMMON AREA – SAME TIME

As Zoe opens the infirmary door, a shard of glass flies out, nailing Simon in the leg. He cries out.

Zoe quickly slams the door shut as more glass shatters against it.

INT. RIVER'S AND PEARL'S MINDS - INFIRMARY

RIVER

Simon!

River turns to the window – concern on her face. Pearl uses the distraction to grab River's throat, choking her. River gasps and pulls at Pearl's hands. She starts kicking with her feet. But nothing weakens Pearl's strong grip.

PEARL

(nonchalant, chit-chatty)

The next one splits his jugular. Your move, River.

River kicks even more wildly.

PEARL (cont'd)

Very well.

Pearl squeezes tighter. River's resistance slows as her eyes roll back. She drops unconscious to the floor.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY – SAME TIME

River cries out in pain for a moment, then collapses to the ground unconscious. Pearl turns to the crew looking through the porthole, and with a dexterous foot, locks the door once more.

MAL
(through the shattered porthole window)
That ain't gonna stop us, sweetheart.

Mal reaches an arm in through the porthole to unlock the door. Pearl is instantly there: she pulls his arm so hard, his head slams into the door on the other side.

She lets go, pushes the door open with force – slamming it against Mal's head once more. He drops like a sack.

What happens next, happens very fast:

Jayne swings Vera in Pearl's direction, firing multiple rounds. Pearl leaps off the open door – using it as a springboard, knocking Jayne and Vera to the ground. Vera goes off loudly, spraying stray bullets everywhere.

Zoe dives for cover to avoid getting hit. She manages to crack off a shot from her mare's leg while doing so, catching Pearl by surprise. The shot hits Pearl in the stomach, but she barely registers pain or even mild nuisance.

Zoe takes only a moment to cock the gun, but in that time, Pearl launches - like a pinball off the wall at Zoe, hitting her headfirst in the stomach. Zoe goes down, dropping her mare's leg. Pearl grabs it, and whacks Zoe in the head with her own gun—

SMACK! Zoe is out, too.

Without turning around, Pearl kicks back and hits Kaylee in the head, taking her down. Simon rushes at Pearl—

SIMON
Kaylee!

And runs right into Pearl's fist. She never even looks at him.

Mal sits up - shakes his head from the wallop.

MAL
Now hold on just a damn moment, girl!

PEARL
The subject is coming with me, back to Eidolon where she belongs. There is nothing you can say or do to change that.

MAL
You sure about that? *Eta kooram na smeck!*

Pearl jumps high into the air.

MAL (cont'd)
Wrong code word?

Mal pulls out his gun, but before he can get a shot off, Pearl's feet land on the gun-barrel, and kick Mal square in the head, sending him sprawling to the floor once more.

MAL (cont'd)
(to himself, coughing)
Wrong code word.

Pearl stands over Mal, and places a foot on his neck – cutting off his air. He gasps, and falls unconscious.

A quiet beat – Pearl looks around her: everyone unconscious; then runs off.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – MOMENTS LATER

Wash stares at the ceiling, feet up on his console, drifting into a snooze when a BUZZING LIGHT starts flashing above him, startling him awake. He jumps, and looks closely at the console.

WASH (into com)
Does someone want to tell me why they're powering up the shuttle?

INT. SERENITY – SHUTTLE ONE – SAME TIME

River lies into the back corner of the shuttle. Pearl sits in the pilot's seat as the engines whine to life.

WASH (via com, cont'd)
Hello?

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM

Grainy black and white. River is totally unkempt. Hair messed and falling over her face. She peers through two strands of hair, directly at the interviewer.

INTERVIEWER
You're very quiet today. How did your session with Doctor Mathias go?

RIVER
(zombie-calm, flat voice)
He gave me a mission.

INTERVIEWER
Really? Did he...tell you your mission out loud, or did you just... hear it?

RIVER
He plays hide-and-seek with me.

INTERVIEWER
Doctor Mathias?

RIVER
My brother. He's a doctor. He thinks he can find me, but I'm deep down... and I do not make... a sound.

INTERVIEWER
River, what mission did Doctor Mathias give you?

RIVER
I can't tell you.

INTERVIEWER
You can tell me anything, you know that.

RIVER
Can't. Tell.

River extends her hand, and makes the first eye contact of the session.

RIVER (cont'd)
(holds her hand out)
I'll have to write it down...

INT. SERENITY - SHUTTLE ONE

Pearl's back is to River, as she starts the preflight sequences. Quietly, River's hand slips down to her boot and pulls out a syringe.

She silently brings the syringe to her neck and jabs it in, pushes down on the plunger. Her eyes tilt into the back of her head.

PEARL
I hope you can grasp this is what is best for you.

RIVER
(whimper)
No more voices?

PEARL
(turns to face River)
No more voices.

RIVER
Simon... I'm never going to see him again...

PEARL
No. You're not.

RIVER
You miss your family... I know you do.

PEARL
Empathy isn't going to work on me, River.

RIVER
(a tear in her eye)
I just... I want to say goodbye. You have to understand...

Pearl looks at her for a contemplative moment.

RIVER (cont'd)
A letter, even?

After a moment, Pearl nods.

RIVER (cont'd)
(points to the trunk, off to the side)
In there.

Pearl moves to the ornate trunk, finds a piece of calligraphy SCROLL and a calligraphy PEN, and hands it to River.

RIVER (cont'd)
(taking it, smiles)
Thank you. There's still a person in there somewhere. I know it.

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM

Grainy black and white. River is gone, but the interviewer remains in his chair, still. Then he coughs. Then violent spluttering, and grasping at something in his neck.

A long, interminable beat of gasping. Finally he pulls a bloody PEN from his neck, placing it on the table.

He gasps deep ineffectual breaths, and with a final grunt, topples right off his chair with a thud.

River suddenly fills the screen, her eyes wide, a bloody hand pressed against the glass.

RIVER
(harsh whisper)
I can see you!

INT. SHUTTLE ONE

Pearl lies motionless and unblinking on the floor. The calligraphy pen sticking out both sides of her neck. River, blood sprayed across her face, looks down at her. Emotionless expression.

RIVER
(spooky, playful tone)
My brain's bigger than your brain.

Then she collapses with exhaustion, against the wall, breathing deeply. She blinks.

FLASHCUT: A Reaver.

River jumps.

RIVER
No... No no no no!

FLASHCUT: A mummified body in overexposed sunlight.

FAST ZOOM into River's frightened eyes.

The pupil of River's eye becomes a PLANET, the surrounding eye fades away into the blackness of space.

FAST ZOOM onto the surface of the planet into a spotlessly white CITY. CORPSES lie everywhere.

BACK ON: River, who collapses to her knees. She looks weak, but her eyes are wide.

RIVER (cont'd)
Miranda... There you are.

Act Four

INT. SERENITY – COMMON AREA – SAME TIME

Everything is blurry. We can make out a shape in front of us that slowly starts to find focus. It's Mal's gun. We realize we're seeing MAL'S POV.

Mal grabs at his gun, sitting up. He rubs his throat and coughs, then looks around: everyone else is still lying there, not moving.

He pushes himself up using the wall, and catches his balance. Then raises his gun and looks in the direction of the cargo hold.

INT. SERENITY – SHUTTLE ONE – SAME TIME

River cowers in a corner of the shuttle, shivering. Wash turns into the shuttle.

WASH
Who is planning to take off without—
(sees River)
River? Why are you—
(sees dead Pearl, steps back)
Zu xian de zhi chuang <Ancestral hemorrhoids>!

RIVER
You have to see. Feel it with your own skin to skin.

WASH
It's okay, River. Just relax, and listen oh so carefully when
I say 'Eta koora—'

River dives at him—

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

Mal, on the cargo bay floor, hears a THUD above him.

He rushes

UP THE STAIRS TO THE UPPER CATWALK

To find Wash lying at the entrance to the shuttle, unconscious.

He checks that Wash is breathing, then turns into the shuttle, gun drawn, and sees dead Pearl. Shocking realization.

MAL
Oh, no... River...

Jayne, Kaylee, Simon, and Zoe come up the stairs. Zoe rushes to Wash.

ZOE
(shaking him)
Wash, baby!?

Wash coughs, sucking in deep breaths.

WASH
River...

JAYNE
(to Kaylee)
See, I tol—

KAYLEE
Don't say it.

JAYNE
Gotta.

Kaylee closes her eyes.

JAYNE (cont'd)
Told. Ya. So, biscuit.

MAL
(re: Wash)
He'll be okay. Winded is all. Check the other shuttle, Zoe.
She coulda snuck on. Jayne – take the downstairs.

They nod. Mal runs off down—

INT. SERENITY – AFT HALL – CONTINUOUS

Toward and into the dining area.

The door closes behind him with a click, and we PAN AROUND to see it was River, who is hiding in the small space next to the door.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

Jayne and Kaylee move out, while Zoe checks her gun.

ZOE
(stands, checks her gun)
You do know what might have to happen now, doctor?

SIMON
Oh, I know where your boundaries are.

Zoe supports Wash as they move off quickly, leaving Simon alone.

He looks in one direction, then another. Lost on what to do. Then something catches his eye. He moves into the—

INT. SERENITY – AFT HALL – CONTINUOUS

—where he looks through the porthole window of the door leading into the dining area.

ANGLE: Simon's POV: Nothing. No one. Then River pops up in front of us!

Simon starts, then waits as she opens the door.

SIMON
It's gonna be oka—

River suddenly elbows his throat viciously. He drops to his knees, shocked and gasping, as she spin-kicks him to the ground.

River runs back into the dining room, closing and locking the door as Zoe comes running back towards Simon.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – MOMENTS LATER

Mal enters the bridge – gun drawn. It's empty. He holsters the gun, looks around, pondering for a beat, when he hears the familiar click of a gun cocking behind him.

He spins – River stands before him. His own gun is leveled at his head. He looks down: his holster is empty.

INT. SERENITY – AFT PASSAGE – SAME TIME

Zoe helps Simon up, as Jayne comes up the stairs. She tries the door. Locked.

JAYNE
Other way's locked up too.

ZOE
She's sealed off the bridge. I do not like her there.

SIMON
(whispers, holding his bruised throat)
It must be that drug. River would never...

JAYNE
"River would never," <my ass>! Know why you didn't see this comin'? 'Cause you're all too busy tryin' to make chicken salad outta chicken turd. That's gorram why! And you know what else—

KAYLEE
(appearing from the stairs below)
Zoe!

Kaylee tosses her a bolt remover. Zoe pulls a bolt out of a panel on the wall. Pops the panel off. Starts wriggling in among the wires.

INT. SERENITY – FOREDECK HALL

A FLOOR PANEL pops up. It's Zoe.

FROM ZOE'S POV: She sees Mal standing on the bridge, alone. She pulls herself up.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – CONTINUOUS

Zoe enters the bridge at a run.

ZOE
Sir! She's here! Somewhere in this section of the ship.

MAL
(deadpan)
Are you sure?

She now sees the situation – River holding Mal's gun on him. Zoe raises her own weapon at River, who is starting to shake.

MAL (cont'd)
Ease off, Zoe.

ZOE
She attacked Simon, too.

MAL
(wary)
That right... You know your brother just wants to protect you...?

RIVER
Can't lie down. He was going to make me sleep.

MAL
Can you blame him? Lot of folk think you're a danger to us. Not worth helping. Are they right? Are you anything but a weapon?

Beat. Mal's words sink in.

MAL (cont'd)

I've staked my crew's life on the theory that you're a person, actual and whole, and if I'm wrong, you'd best shoot me now.

(River cocks the gun)

Or we could talk more...

RIVER

(points a shaking finger at the screen)

Miranda.

It's a planet. Matches the one from her dream.

Then River's shaking increases violently, so much she can barely hold the gun.

RIVER

Doctor will tell you. Skin to skin... SKIN. TO. SKIN!

FLASHCUT - A SNARLING REAVER!

The gun in River's hand goes off. Mal spins. Blood sprays.

ZOE

Eta kooram na smeck!

The gun falls to the ground. And so does River, unconscious. Mal stands, touches his arm – a flesh wound. Then looks at Zoe. And breathes.

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – LATER

Everyone but River has gathered, sitting at the table. Mal has a bandage over his arm. Everyone just stares ahead, listless and shellshocked. Until:

KAYLEE

...How come there's a whole planet called Miranda and none of us knewed that?

MAL

Because there isn't one. It's a blackrock. Uninhabitable. Terraforming didn't hold, or somesuch. Few settlers died.

WASH

But there's nothing about it on the Cortex – History, Astronomy... It's not there.

MAL

Half of writing history is hiding the truth. There's something on that rock the Alliance doesn't want known.

SIMON

Then we should know it.

MAL

Ain't about to dive into the unknown again any time soon,
Doctor.

(rubs his shoulder-wound)

Thought you mighta gleaned a lesson from today.

SIMON

(deflated, defeated)

So you're going to do nothing.

JAYNE

I'm up for nothing.

WASH

Nothing does sound like gleeful fun right about now.

Zoe puts a hand on Wash's shoulder – 'not now, dear'. Mal ignores them.

MAL

Didn't say that either... Ain't had much time to process
this mess, what with a warm corpse decoratin' the shuttle.

FAST ZOOM: Through the window of the storage locker. River lies, cuffed like
before.

SIMON (VO)

So what happens to my sister?

ZOOM OUT: the crew.

MAL

Well, she gets no points for shooting me, if that's what
you're askin'... It all hinges on what you can tell us about
what happened here today. She took that drug. Didn't
stay normal long. Then got worse.

JAYNE

Then homi-ruttin'-cidal.

SIMON

(sighs, holds up the data-pen)

From what I've read so far, they call it Delcium Sulphate.
I'm not entirely sure what it's supposed to do. Something
about bridging broken synapses in a damaged brain. The
dosing is extremely complicated, and the effects are
temporary. River was... hyperstimulated.

MAL

That fancible surgeon speak for 'nearly blowing my head
clean off'?

SIMON

The daily dose of Delcium is twenty drop. Today she took two hundred! Caused a brainstorm, uh, overdose. Pure animal instinct.

MAL

Animals need cages.

INT. SPLITSCREEN: SERENITY – DINING ROOM/STORAGE LOCKER

River lies in the storage locker. River on the right, Mal on the left. At the same time:

MAL (cont'd)

She's too unpredictable...

RIVER

She's too unpredictable...

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM

Grainy black & White. River is young, well-groomed, bright eyed and smiling. Fresh.

INTERVIEWER

I think you can do whatever you put your mind to. That's what the Alliance needs. That's what this institute is all about... your mind - letting it do everything it could. Does that sound like something you'd be interested in?

River looks around, not sure what to answer.

INT. SERENITY – STORAGE LOCKER

River shivers. Disheveled, fear and dried blood on her face, she hugs herself close. She rocks back and forth, mumbling silently.

FLASHCUT: Simon sits alone in his room, staring at a frozen black and white image of a happy, vibrant younger girl. He hits PLAY.

Back to River, lying in the dark.

RIVER (VO, echo)

Would I still be allowed to dance?

INT. BENA – TRAINING HOUSE – INARA'S ROOM - NEXT DAY

Inara wakes with sunlight on her face, tangled in the sheets, naked. She stares up at the ceiling for a beat, then smiles. She rolls over, and sees a single RED ROSE next to the bed with a NOTE attached.

The note reads: *"Urgent business that could no longer wait. Will be thinking of you throughout. See you soon – J."*

EXT. HAVEN – NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

Serenity sits parked next to the “big stick” (anti-aircraft cannon).

EXT. HAVEN – NIGHT

Mal and Book walk through the dark mining town; bonfires the only light to see by.

BOOK

Alliance ships and programmed girls...

MAL

Seems the place was a mite less dispeopled than your brochure said... Thank you for taking us in again, 'specially now that you know the danger we're putting you in just by being here.

BOOK

That's what friends do. Might do to look it up some time.

Mal smirks at the dig. They walk in silence for a beat. Book senses Mal's worry.

BOOK (cont'd)

Only one thing is gonna walk you through this, Mal. Belief.

MAL

Sermons make me sleepy, Shepherd. I ain't looking for help from on high. That's a long wait for a train don't come.

BOOK

When I talk about belief, why do you always assume I'm talking about God?

(Mal has no response)

They'll come at you sideways...

INT. AREA 54 – RECORDS ROOM

The Glasses Man, in silhouette, watches a HOLOPROJECTION of grainy black & white footage – River in the laboratory. REFLECTIONS of River glint off his glasses.

BOOK (VO)

It's how they think: sideways. It's how they move. Sidle up and smile, hit you where you're weak.

EXT. HAVEN – SAME TIME

BOOK (cont'd)

Sorta man they're like to send believes hard. Kills and never asks why.

MAL

It's of interest to me how much you seem to know about that world.

BOOK

Wasn't born a Shepherd, Mal.

MAL

Have to tell me about that some time.

BOOK

(looking out)

No. I don't.

He walks off, offering this:

BOOK (cont'd)

Sideways...

INT. AREA 54 – RECORDS ROOM

The Records Room is a long and bare room but for drawers of holographic records, a set-up for watching recordings. In the dim light, the Glasses Man watches a grainy black & white HOLOGRAM of Doctor Mathias and the inspector, looking over at River, who is strapped to a chair.

MATHIAS

Key members of Parliament have personally observed this subject. The demonstration of her power—

INSPECTOR

How is she physically?

MATHIAS

Like nothing we've seen. All our subjects are conditioned for combat, but Tam... she's a creature of extraordinary—

GLASSES MAN

Stop.

The hologram freezes.

GLASSES MAN (cont'd)

Backtrack.

The hologram reverses, retracing the Inspector's and Mathias' steps.

GLASSES MAN (cont'd)

Stop.

The hologram stops on a close up of River, asleep in her chair.

The Glasses Man steps out of silhouette into the fluorescent light in the center of the room. He wears a SUIT too nondescript to be a uniform, too neat for casual wear.

The Glasses Man is Jude.

FLASHCUT: *Inara pulls Jude quickly toward her, kissing him. She pulls off his shirt, and they drop onto the bed.*

The image of River floats near Jude.

MATHIAS (OS)

Excuse me!

Doctor Mathias – greyer and more gaunt than in the video – storms in. With him are two BLUE SUN TROUBLESHOOTERS in business suits and blue gloves.

MATHIAS (cont'd)

No one is allowed in the records room without my express permission.

JUDE

Enter the doctor.

(to Mathias)

Forgive me. I prefer to see the events without bias.

Mathias looks at the hologram – realizes which one it is.

MATHIAS

I need to see your clearance.

JUDE

And you are right to insist. I know you've had security issues here.

He places his hand on a screen as he says it. Mathias looks at the readout, and drops the bluster; nods to the Troubleshooters, who appear to stand at ease.

MATHIAS

Apologies. An Operative of the Parliament will of course have full cooperation.

(looks at the screen)

I'm not sure what... I see no listing of rank, or name.

JUDE/OPERATIVE

I have neither. Like this facility, I don't exist. The Parliament calls me when... when they wish they didn't have to. Let's talk about the Tams.

MATHIAS

I assume you've scanned the status logs...

OPERATIVE

River was your greatest success. A prodigy – a phenomenon. Until she was taken from you.

MATHIAS

It's not quite so simple.

The Troubleshooters split up, taking up positions on both sides of the Operative. He notices the movement.

OPERATIVE

I'm very aware of that.

MATHIAS

I don't have to explain myself to anyone. Least of all Parliament!

(off-kilter)

Why are you here?

OPERATIVE

I'm here because the situation is even less simple than you think... Do you know what your sin is, Doctor?

MATHIAS

I... I would be very careful about what you—

OPERATIVE

(sadly)

It's pride.

He touches a small CONTROL STAND near the hologram, and the image jumps to life:

MATHIAS (hologram)

Key members of Parliament have personally observed this subject. I was told their support—

OPERATIVE

(shutting it off)

Key members of Parliament. Key. The minds behind every diplomatic, military, and covert operation in the system and you put them in a room with a psychic.

MATHIAS

She was... she reads cards, nothing more.

OPERATIVE

It's come to our attention that River became much more unstable, more... disturbed, after you showed her off to Parliament. Did she see something very terrible in those cards?

MATHIAS

If there was some... classified information that she... well, she never spoke of it. I don't know what it is.

OPERATIVE

Nor do I. And judging by her deteriorating mental state I'd say we're both better off. Secrets are not my concern. Keeping them is...

The Operative hits another button, and a new hologram fills the space. It is a split-screen image, and unlike the previous security footage, the hologram is two-dimensional. On one side is Doctor Mathias, but only from the waist up. He sits at a desk. On the other stands one of the Troubleshooters.

At the bottom corner of the image it reads:

WAVE TRANSMISSION LOG – PROSPERO - SECURE FREQUENCY

MATHIAS (hologram)

Did everything go as planned?

TROUBLESHOOTER #1 (hologram)

The subject escaped, sir, per the Board's directive.

The wave transmission ends. The room is silent.

The Operative looks to Mathias, who is beginning to sweat, then to the two Troubleshooters. Their blue hands twitch. Their eyes stare, deadly and empty.

He hits the button again. A new hologram springs up, this time, Doctor Mathias talking to his associate, CHARLES.

CHARLES (hologram)

You remotely activated one of the Gui!?

MATHIAS (hologram)

I sent her with a retrieval program, yes. I couldn't sit back and do nothing, Charles! She's our creation, in a way! I cannot allow Parliament to just take aim and destroy our creation!

Again, silence.

The Operative removes his glasses, and slips them into his breast pocket.

OPERATIVE

You know, our man on Prospero was charged with bringing her in alive. Now things are different. It is the will of the Parliament that she die. And the brother. Because of your sin.

He moves to a BRIEFCASE.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

You know, in certain older civilized cultures, when men failed as entirely as you have, they would throw themselves on their swords.

MATHIAS

Well, unfortunately I forgot to bring a sword to—

The air RINGS crisply as the Operative pulls out his SWORD.

OPERATIVE

The Parliament has no further interest in psychics. They represent a threat to the harmony and stability of our Alliance.

MATHIAS

I would put that down right now if I were you.

The Operative holds the sword out to Mathias, as if offering it to him.

OPERATIVE

And so the question is...

FLASHCUT: Inara is on top of Jude, under the covers. They kiss passionately.

OPERATIVE (VO, cont'd)

...Would you be killed in your sleep, like an ailing pet?

Mathias nods at the two Troubleshooters. Their blue hands move lightning fast, reaching into their coats.

The Operative moves faster, turns the sword into his hand, and SLICES the throat of the one behind him with true grace, thrusting at the second as he pulls out a WAND-LIKE DEVICE from his suit-pocket.

The device sparks and explodes with a pop as the sword slices through his suit, pinning his hand to the BLUE ARMOUR we now see underneath his shirt. The Operative thrusts the sword deeper – right THROUGH the blue armor.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

Whatever your failings, I believe you deserve better than that.

FLASHCUT : *Intimate, slow, rhythmic sex. Jude and Inara never break eye contact.*

The Operative pulls out the sword and the second Troubleshooter falls as quietly as the first, his throat slit with a clean cut.

Mathias bolts, but the Operative pins him to the wall. He BUNCHES HIS FINGERS and JABS the side of the doctor's SPINE.

Mathias stiffens, suddenly agonizingly immobile.

FLASHCUT : *The rhythm increases in intensity. Pleasure on Inara's face.*

The Operative steps back, observes the Doctor's rigid grimace for a moment. Almost ceremoniously, he drops to one knee and holds the blade out to one side, hilt to the floor and point tilted toward the doctor. The Doctor stares at it in horror as his paralyzed body begins to tip toward it.

FLASHCUT: *Heavy breathing. Climax. Inara collapses on top of him, whispers something into his ear, smiling.*

OPERATIVE (VO, cont'd)
In the end, we all want the same things...

FLASHCUT: *Inara looks at the rose, then takes the card in her hand, reading it once more: "...thinking of you throughout. See you soon – J."*

OPERATIVE (VO, cont'd)
...accomplishment for the betterment of humanity. To love and be loved...

Mathias stares down from the blade at the warm, sensitive eyes of the Operative.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
You betrayed us for love. For the girl, for what you've created. For yourself. But that is understandable. One cannot control an emotion. It would be futile even to tr—

He's almost startled when the Doctor's body drops into frame, slowed suddenly by the sword. It squeaks down the blade, the Doctor unable to cry out, as the Operative whispers to him:

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
This is a good death. There's no shame in this, in a man's death. A man who's done fine works. We're making a better world. All of them, better worlds.

Mathias is dead. The Operative pulls the sword out as the body rolls over.

As he wipes the sword down with a white handkerchief, he approaches the control stand, hits a few buttons, and the image of River again fills the empty space. She sleeps in her chair, connected to wires and machines. He steps up to her, very close, staring into her eyes...

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

I have tired of this cat and mouse. Now, you come to me,
little girl.

BLACKOUT